



House Committee on International Relations

“The Way Forward in the Middle East Peace Process”

February 10, 2005

**Submitted for the record by Ziad Asali, MD
President, American Task Force on Palestine**

Chairman Hyde, distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for giving me the privilege to be here today to discuss with you the future of peace in the Middle East.

The American Task Force on Palestine was founded to promote the view that creating a state of Palestine, living alongside Israel in peace, is vital to the national security of our country. We are gratified by the diplomatic progress that has taken place this week.

Last month, it was my honor to be a member of the official delegation our government sent to observe the Palestinian elections. The group was comprised of eight members: Senators Biden and Sununu, two Palestinian Americans – I being one of them - and four senior Senatorial staff members who were later joined by the U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem. In an intense and compact program we met with the two Palestinian front runners and, separately, with the Palestinian and Israeli Prime Ministers, the leaders of the International Observers, President Carter, and Prime Ministers Rocard of France and Bilt of Sweden. We also met with the President of the Palestinian Election Committee and his senior staff.

To me, and perhaps to others, by far the most fascinating and energizing part of this trip was the contact with the Palestinian people. We visited eight voting stations. Three of these were in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, four in Jerusalem--- at Jafa Gate, Shufat, Al-Tour Mount Scopus, and Salaheddin Street--- and finally, at closing time, we visited Bethany Al Ayzariyyeh to observe the closing of the vote and counting of ballots. These places were the stomping grounds of my youth. No experience in my life can match the singular mix of emotions that I felt that day. A host of passions swelled within me, a sense of pride and humility, of strength and vulnerability, hope and trepidation, a sense of identity and identification as I moved around people familiar and not so familiar. Here I was, a member of my country's delegation to my home town, the place of my birth and the home of my forefathers, come to bear witness to the birth of democracy, and to the promise of an independent state. I felt the overwhelming sense of being part of a significant piece of history in the making.

I went around asking many questions: "How do you feel? Has anybody intimidated you? Bribed you? Tried to dissuade you from voting? Or to prevent you from traveling?" The answer was uniform and consistent: "No, no one did." After getting over their early suspicions, many of them were eager to talk. The 85 year-old grandmother assisted by two of her grandchildren told me, "This is my right." The middle aged professional woman said, "We did not need a campaign. We know what we are doing, and we know whom to vote for." And there were the young men insisting on visiting all stations in Jerusalem until they found the one with their names listed. The children were playful and at one point, broke out around us in a chant about the elections. Pictures were taken. Adults were somber. They did not know what to make of me. I was one of them, yet I was with the Americans. Many of them asked questions of me and I answered them. They asked, "Are the Americans serious?" They asked, "Do you think Bush will do something?" "Yes, yes," I said, "as long as you do what you are doing now." I shook hands, talked about their lives and mine and communicated silently with strangers and knew that these people sensed the weight of the moment. They did their part; they stood peacefully and silently in lines, and, by their vote, they gave the message to the world about the dignity of a people voting under occupation to seek freedom from occupation. By their vote, Palestinians gave the most eloquent response to those who would paint them all with the broad brush of terror and fanaticism.

The Election Committee prepared for these elections for two and a half years coping with life under occupation, under conditions of siege, with check points, restrictions of mobility and of communications. Teachers, both men and women, volunteered to work at the election stations which were headed by school principals. The committee, and the people, performed admirably. Dead people did not vote, no one voted twice and there were no chads. People stood in line in quiet dignity and in numbers. No harsh words were exchanged between candidates or their supporters and there were no serious accusations of fraud. Palestinian democracy was off to a solid start.

There were some problems. The Israelis and Palestinians negotiated a deal for the Palestinians of Jerusalem to vote in 1996. Only a small fraction was allowed to vote in the city while the majority had to vote in the West Bank. Those who voted in Jerusalem had to do so at the post offices by posting their vote in mailboxes so their residency status will remain unresolved. The same rules of 1996 applied during this election. Fewer than six thousand people were allowed to vote in the city and around one hundred and twenty thousand had to vote in the West Bank. Many Jerusalemites were unable to vote in their neighborhoods because their names were not on the list. We heard many stories about individuals who moved to several stations before they eventually went to the West Bank where they could vote. Some gave up. By noon time it was clear to the international observers and the election committee that many people who wanted to vote had difficulties, so the stations were held open for all qualified voters and the hours were extended until 9 pm rather than 7 pm. Some staff members of the election committee objected to the change of rules to extend voting time to 9 pm. Several members resigned later on over their concern for the integrity of future parliamentary elections but they clearly mentioned that they believed that the changes they objected to had no impact on the outcome of current elections. None of the nine commissioners of the Committee resigned. The over 800 international monitors certified the elections without reservations as free and fair. We heard of no evidence of Israel interfering with or impeding access to elections.

The people have spoken and with just under seventy percent having voted, Mr. Abbas was elected by over 62 %, and the runner up received 19%. Mr. Abbas's base of support far exceeded his own party – Fatah's - base of about 30%. The silent majority voted for Abbas' message of peaceful negotiations.

The Palestinian people have created their democracy. Now, they must have their freedom. The 3.5 million Palestinians in the occupied territories are not citizens of the state that rules them, or any other state. What can the meaning of liberty and self-government be without the fundamental prerequisite of citizenship? They are the largest stateless group in a world composed of citizens of nation-states. Moreover, they have been suffering under more than 37 years of military occupation by Israel, which has now become the longest continuing military occupation in recent history. There is no people on earth more badly in need of freedom than the Palestinians.

On January 9th, Mr. Abbas gained legitimacy. What he now needs is to enhance and to use power and authority. One major asset that he has established is his own credibility. During his one hundred days as Prime Minister under Arafat, during his "wilderness" days out of office and out of favor, during his election campaign, and consistently after his victory, he kept repeating his mantra of opposition to violence, his call for unifying security agencies and his pursuit of peaceful negotiations. There was no double talk and no ambiguity. I met him during all these stages and he always said the same things in private that he said in public.



It has been widely and correctly observed that the election and the victory of President Abbas have created new opportunities to resolve this most damaging of conflicts. This, together with the renewed commitment of President Bush to the Roadmap and to the creation of a Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel, and Prime Minister Sharon's Disengagement Plan for Gaza and several settlements in the West Bank, constitute the elements for significant progress.

Mr. Abbas is in the unenviable position of presiding as a president without a state, just as the Palestinian Authority has been held to the responsibilities of a state without having the authority, sovereignty or prerogatives of an independent state. He has courageously staked his political future, and perhaps even personal safety, on achieving freedom for his people through peaceful negotiations. The political, historical, cultural, religious, national, regional and international forces at play in the Palestinian body politic preclude any neat and clear resolution of the question of authority and power by a democratic election. The newly-elected President has to reason with adversaries, to threaten at this time only by persuasion, to explain to his opponents that alternatives are less attractive than what he has to offer. He has to come up with the arguments for giving up the use of force even if Israel persists in assassinations and in violent incursions. He has to explain why and how he could trust this American Administration with its record of unabashed support of the heavy hand of Mr. Sharon. He has to explain his views about the unconscionable cost the Palestinian people had to pay for using violence. He has to explain his strategy to his political opponents knowing full well that they are as convinced of the utility of violence as he is of its futility. As he explains, argues and cajoles, he has to acquire a bigger stick, and perhaps he will be forced to use it.

To succeed, he needs serious assistance from all parties. He is physically and materially dependent on others -- the weakened Palestinian bureaucracy, the United States and Israel -- to help him carry out most of his program. He understands that the immediate task for Palestinians is to restructure and reform the Palestinian Authority and its institutions. Having correctly identified security as the indispensable item to deliver for his people and to these two countries, he is in a position to deliver on his campaign promise. Delivering on security is worth the overwhelming risk he is undertaking, because without it there is no strategy other than a continuation of the present miserable state of affairs. There can be no compromise on a disciplined and accountable security apparatus. Without security, there is no hope for peace. That said, it is imperative to recognize that security concerns for both Palestinians and Israelis are only a first step in a process that must lead to a full peace agreement, and to understand that in the long run security can only be truly guaranteed by implementing a viable and equitable political relationship between the parties.

For the new Palestinian leadership to succeed, it is equally important to establish the rule of law and to remove the appearance and reality of corruption. Mr. Abbas' mandate may be tested in upcoming municipal and legislative elections, where opposition groups may exploit long-standing concerns about corruption and lack of social services. It is imperative that the Palestinian government have the resources needed to deliver services

to its people, or others will step into the void. However, the practical difficulties for President Abbas in dealing with the problem of corruption were outlined by the leading Palestinian pollster and analyst Khalil Shikaki at a February 2, 2005, briefing at the Palestine Center in Washington DC. According to a summary of that briefing provided by the Center:

Shikaki said that Abbas must begin the difficult task of simultaneously confronting corruption and violence. "There is no way he can do that because to fight corruption, he must deal with those persons and groups who can deliver security," acknowledged Shikaki. However, if Abbas confronts those who are able to deliver security because of his simultaneous need to deal with corruption, "there will be a big question mark about his ability to maintain the cease fire," said Shikaki. He reiterated that if Abbas does not deal with corruption, Hamas will win at least 70 to 90 percent of the local councils and that will have a determinative effect on the outcome of parliamentary elections as well as any legislative action on the issue of corruption. If Abbas decides to go after corruption, Shikaki said that he will need to confront the Fatah Central Committee, the body that nominated Abbas for the presidency, "which is going to fight him tooth and nail." He noted that Abbas has indicated that he has no intention of confronting the senior officials in the security establishment on the issue of corruption, and is instead relying completely on them to deliver security.

(<http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/images/fortherecord.php?ID=226>)

The way to help President Abbas square this circle is to provide the needed financial and technical aid, and the appointment of Lt. General William Ward as "security coordinator" to supervise reform of the Palestinian security forces is a good start. Certainly, more aid and technical support will be needed in the future.

The Israeli government is clearly in a position to do much to either help or harm the credibility of the new Palestinian leadership. From Israel, President Abbas needs cooperation and coordination. Israel has a variety of carrots and sticks and it can help lay the foundation of peace if it uses them to restructure the Palestinian-Israeli relation to one of potential partners bound together by the shared destiny of eternal neighbors. What matters is the strategic realignment that the moment promises. Forces of accommodation and reconciliation on both sides can empower each other now, leaving the logic of the zero-sum game behind. Forward-looking new thinking, away from tribal, nationalistic and religious hostile instincts is urgently called for. What is needed now is to coordinate moves that provide the mechanisms for separation of potential partners as they work out the framework of a historic compromise.



The 37-year long occupation has been extremely onerous to the Palestinian people, as the following synopses illustrate on four key points: settlements and land expropriation, the separation barrier, checkpoints, and home demolitions.

Settlements and Land Expropriation:

According to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, "Over the past 35 years, Israel has used a complex legal and bureaucratic mechanism to take control of more than fifty percent of the land in the West Bank."

(www.btselem.org/english/Settlements/Land_Takeover.asp)

Israel has used this process to establish hundreds of settlements in the West Bank and to populate them with hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens, preventing Palestinians from legally retaining ownership of or using these lands. According to B'Tselem:

Since 1967, each Israeli government has...expand[ed] the settlements in the Occupied Territories, both in terms of the area of land they occupy and in terms of population. As a result of this policy, approximately 380,000 Israeli citizens now live on the settlements in the West Bank, including those established in East Jerusalem.

(www.btselem.org/English/Settlements/Index.asp)

The settlement infrastructure includes approximately 400 miles of bypass roads which crisscross the West Bank and Gaza. (www.btselem.org/english/statistics/20043112_2004_statistics.asp)

These roads are designated for Israeli-only use thereby forbidding Palestinians from using them. Successive American administrations going back to President Carter (including Presidents Reagan, Bush, Clinton and the current President Bush), have opposed the policy of the government of Israel on settlements. Furthermore, the Geneva Conventions clearly prohibits an occupying power from transferring citizens from its own territory to the occupied territory. Settlement construction increased by 35% in 2003, and "between 1993 and 2000 the number of settlers on the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) increased by almost 100 percent" despite opposition to them. (<http://www.btselem.org/English/Settlements/Index.asp>) A poll conducted by the pro-Israel peace organization Americans for Peace Now in July 2003, found that 8 out of 10 settlers would agree to return to Israel if compensated.

The Separation Barrier:

The construction of the 455 mile long barrier in the West Bank is a major problem for the Palestinians since its current path cuts off hundreds of thousands of acres of Palestinian real estate (*CQ Researcher, Middle East Peace*, January 2005). The barrier's path would have been more appropriately built along the internationally recognized boundary between Israel and the occupied West Bank. A United Nations fact finding mission in



November, 2003, discovered that only 11% of the barrier's route as planned at the time coincided with the green line. The remaining 89% curved deep into Palestinian territory (this has now been revised to 85%, as noted below). The Palestinians have challenged the legality of the route and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague ruled that the path was illegal. Yet barrier construction inside the West Bank continues. A September 2004 report by the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states:

A new Barrier map was issued by the Israeli Ministry of Defense on 30 June 2004, altering prior routes published on 23 October 2003 and 25 March 2004. The revised route places fewer Palestinians on the west side of the Barrier but does not reduce significantly the amount of land from which the Barrier separates Palestinian landowners and farmers from their land. The revised route removes two large enclaves in the Salfit and Ramallah governorates from the prior route. However, two major roads generally prohibited for Palestinian use run across the open side of the revised route, and effectively act as barriers to Palestinian movement out of these areas. Accordingly, it is unlikely that this revision will improve the humanitarian access for the majority of Palestinians. The revised route creates two semi- enclaves and an additional four new enclaves. The revised route reduces the total length of the Barrier by 16 kilometers.

The report also noted that "While part of the Barrier runs along the 1949 Armistice or the Green Line, approximately 85% of the revised planned route of the Barrier intrudes into the West Bank, up to 22 kilometers in the case of the Ari'el 'finger.'" (http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/opt/docs/UN/OCHA/BARRIER-REP_Update-4_%5BEn%5D-Sep2004.pdf)

Checkpoints:

The Israeli system of checkpoints and roadblocks in the occupied territories severely inhibit the Palestinian people from carrying out an ordinary life. According to the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2003, Israel and the occupied territories* published by the State Department:

- "Each day, tens of thousands of Palestinians traveling between Palestinian towns and villages faced as many as 730 different barriers to movement."
- "Israeli security forces harassed and abused Palestinian pedestrians and drivers who attempted to pass through the approximately 430 Israeli-controlled checkpoints in the occupied territories."
- "The Israeli Government severely restricted freedom of movement for Palestinians [by enforcing] a massive network of checkpoints and roadblocks



- across the occupied territories, which impeded the movement of people and goods between Palestinian cities, villages, and towns.”
- “Economic problems and checkpoint obstacles affected the availability of food to Palestinian children. During the year, USAID and Johns Hopkins University reported that 7.8 percent of Palestinian children under 5 suffered from acute malnutrition, 11.7 percent suffered chronic malnutrition, and 44 percent were anemic.”
 - “Israeli security forces at checkpoints often impeded the provision of medical assistance to sick and injured Palestinians.”
- (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27929.htm>)

Home Demolitions:

Human rights groups estimate that more than 20,000 Palestinian homes were demolished by Israeli occupation forces from 1967 to the early 1990s. Over the last four years, Israel has demolished more than 3,000 homes, leaving tens of thousands of men, women and children homeless or without a livelihood. In a May 2004 report Amnesty International said “Israel’s unjustified destruction of thousands of Palestinian and Arab Israeli homes as well as vast areas of agricultural land has reached an unprecedented level and must stop immediately.” Amnesty continued, “In the Occupied Territories, demolitions are often carried out as collective punishments for Palestinian attacks or to facilitate the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements. Both practices contravene international law and some of these acts are war crimes.” (*Under the rubble: House demolition and destruction of land and property*, Amnesty International, Report, 18 May, 2004, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde150332004>).

In addition, it should be noted that in the past 4 years of violence, more than 1,000 Israelis and 3,500 Palestinians have been killed, most of them on both sides unarmed civilians. The security of one people cannot be separated from security of the other – both must be protected. Honorable, competent leaders are the key to lead both people at this most difficult period of transition at a time where trust is the most precious commodity. We all know what is needed on the Israeli side to achieve this; fewer checkpoints, end of humiliation, relief from violence by settlers and the Israeli military, release of prisoners, and military withdrawal. Last but certainly not least is creating no new “realities on the ground” that contradict the vision laid out by President Bush or the Roadmap, such as settlement or outpost growth, home demolitions, land confiscation and predetermining final status issues such as borders and Jerusalem through the route of the West Bank barrier. Helping Mr. Abbas to deliver results for his people must be as much a litmus test of Mr. Sharon’s credibility as Mr. Abbas’s moves on security are properly a test of his.

As for the United States, President Bush has set exactly the right tone since his reelection by reiterating his commitment to the Roadmap and to his vision of a two-state peace that he outlined in his speech of June 24, 2002. He has said a Palestinian state can be born



before the end of his second term. President Bush understands that the high expectations of this moment need to be reflected in a palpable improvement in the daily lives of the Palestinian people, and he is sending the right message. He has sent Secretary Rice to visit Israel and the Palestinian Territories in her first trip abroad, designated Lt. Gen. William Ward "security coordinator" for the region, and has asked the Congress for \$150 million in FY06 economic assistance and an expected \$200 million in the upcoming supplemental request. Our President is asking you to lend him your bi-partisan support, for this tangible and timely assistance, which sets an example for the rest of world to emulate.

President Abbas urgently needs our good offices, and assistance ranging from financial to educational, civic, cultural, technical, trade and security issues. He has no state and his country is under occupation. He has a budget deficit of 650 million dollars for this fiscal year and has 120,000 employees on his payroll. Many of them serve in a fragmented security apparatus and a bloated bureaucracy. Many need to be sent home in order to build an efficient functional state apparatus. Learning from the Iraq model, it is wise to send them on a pension. This alone will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. He needs to rebuild the foundations of all aspects of his nation top to bottom. Without effective external help he is guaranteed to fail.

We have within our grasp not just the opportunity to lay the foundation for an end to conflict, but also to foster a strategic realignment where Palestine will be an ally of the United States and a partner to Israel in peace. Ultimately, security and peace will be achieved by establishing a viable, contiguous, independent and democratic Palestinian state, with a shared Jerusalem serving as a capital for two states, and with a fair solution to the refugee problem according to international law. The "painful concession" Israel must make is to return the occupied Palestinian territories to their rightful owners. However, for this year of 2005, three tasks must be accomplished:

- 1) Establishing close security cooperation, with active US support. Prompt activation of committees established in Sharm el Sheikh with scrupulous implementation of agreements by both parties.**
- 2) Both parties implementing their commitments under the Roadmap, as they coordinate the Disengagement Plan.**
- 3) Reforming and restructuring the Palestinian Authority.**

With active U.S. engagement, these tasks can be accomplished. In order to achieve significant progress, Palestinians need to create order and security, and Israel must refrain from implementing any unilateral measures that can prejudice the outcome of final status issues such as borders, refugees, settlements and the status of Jerusalem. Both parties must abide by the conditions of the Roadmap.



1. Establishing close security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, with active US support. Prompt activation of committees established in Sharm el Sheikh with scrupulous implementation of agreements by both parties.

The successful deployment of Palestinian police in northern and southern Gaza is a manifestation of early security cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians. With the declaration of the ceasefire at the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, such cooperation will only intensify as Israel prepares to redeploy from five Palestinian cities in the coming weeks, to be followed by a more comprehensive redeployment and the Gaza Disengagement Plan. Each instance of cooperation will serve to build trust between both sides and establish momentum for future cooperation. The appointment by President Bush of Lt. General William Ward as “security coordinator” to supervise reform of the Palestinian security forces is a positive first step by the United States and an example of the hands-on and active approach required as Israelis and Palestinians take these first tentative measures towards rebuilding trust and confidence.

At the conclusion of the Sharm El Sheikh summit, five committees were appointed to follow up on outstanding issues. These committees must be activated promptly and their decisions must be implemented scrupulously. No confidence building measures are better than verifying implementation of agreements and the United States will be playing a crucial role in this process.

2. Both parties implementing their commitments under the Roadmap, as they coordinate the Disengagement Plan from Gaza and parts of the West Bank.

Israel’s Disengagement Plan from Gaza and parts of the West Bank has been welcomed by all parties as complementary to the Roadmap, and, although initially a unilateral Israeli action, it is now likely to be a coordinated effort. A joint security committee has already been established, and is scheduled to start meetings to ensure an orderly, secure and successful Israeli withdrawal.

While most Palestinians are suspicious of Israeli PM Sharon’s intentions, his plan means the irreversible end to a Greater Israel based on metaphysical and religious claims. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon both parties to live up to their responsibilities to ensure that the disengagement is successful and serves as momentum for further moves towards peace. It is essential that Palestinian leaders and police ensure that the Israeli disengagement is not conducted ‘under fire’ and can serve as a precursor and model for future Israeli withdrawals. Israeli responsibilities, on the other hand, include undertaking a real end to the occupation of Gaza and a more comprehensive approach to the Disengagement Plan. Such an approach will serve to place the disengagement in the political context of a final and comprehensive agreement in order to alleviate deeply held Palestinian concerns that the Disengagement Plan is an attempt to buy time to consolidate Israel’s hold on the West Bank.

Phase One of the Roadmap shoulders the Palestinians with the responsibilities of ending



terror and violence, and building Palestinian institutions. Since the passing of President Yasser Arafat, the new leadership has made significant strides in meeting these responsibilities. The Palestinian elections held on January 9, 2005, under occupation, heralded the birth of Palestinian democracy, placing the Palestinians at the forefront of Arab democratization efforts. While there still remain provisions under Phase One of the Roadmap for the Palestinians to implement, in the four weeks since the elections (which were themselves a Roadmap provision), the Palestinian leadership has reiterated its commitment to implementing its Roadmap responsibilities, has successfully negotiated a ceasefire pledge from Palestinian militant groups, has instructed official Palestinian media to abstain from any statements or messages that may be construed as incitement, and has deployed thousands of Palestinian police in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's primary responsibility under Phase One, an end to settlement activities including "natural growth" of existing settlements, has yet to be fulfilled in any meaningful sense. On February 7, 2005, the *Washington Post* reported that:

The Israeli government and private Jewish groups are working in concert to build a human cordon around Jerusalem's Old City and its disputed holy sites, moving Jewish residents into Arab neighborhoods to consolidate their grip on strategic locations, according to critics of the effort and a *Washington Post* investigation. The goal is to establish Jewish enclaves in and around Arab-dominated East Jerusalem and eventually link them to form a ring around the city, a key battleground in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict because of its Jewish and Muslim holy sites, according to activists involved in the effort and critics of the campaign.

("Israelis Act to Encircle East Jerusalem," *Washington Post*, February 7, 2005; A15)

Such aggressive settlement activity is a clear example of how unilateral measures designed to prejudice critical final status issues serve as an obstacle to realizing President Bush's vision of peace based on two states, and why ending such activities is the primary Israeli responsibility under Phase One of the Roadmap.

3. Reform and restructuring of the Palestinian Authority.

Establishing the Rule of Law is the main and immediate task facing the new presidency of Mr. Abbas. More specifically, the two main areas of reform that are essential for the Palestinians to address are those of corruption and restructuring and unifying the security services. It is important to stress that these areas of reform can and should proceed independently of the Israeli-Palestinian peace track. They are reforms essential to the Palestinian national interest and serve in laying the groundwork for building the representative and accountable institutions necessary for a robust democracy. The participation of Secretary of State Rice in the upcoming March 1-2 conference in London, which will focus on building institutions that will form the bedrock of a



Palestinian state, is an important and timely contribution. We urge Congress to support the President and the Administration by authorizing the necessary funds to assist in building these vital institutions.

The Palestinians have made impressive strides in addressing corruption and managing Palestinian finances to be transparent, and attractive to international donors. While work on this ongoing process remains to be done, Finance Minister Salam Fayyad, recognized worldwide for his credibility and reputability, has made great strides and demonstrated serious diligence in working to accomplish this priority. As an example, the Palestinian national budget is the only one from any Arab country to be posted online.

Security is the indispensable item for Mr. Abbas to deliver, both for his people and for Israelis. Delivering on security is worth the overwhelming risk he is undertaking because without security there is no peace strategy. The ceasefire declaring a formal end to more than four years of fighting by both parties at the summit held in Egypt on Tuesday, February 8, 2005, is an early and positive sign of Mr. Abbas' appreciation and seriousness about this issue. The appointing of a new Palestinian security chief to oversee the process of unifying and training the Palestinian security services is another critical component of restructuring the Palestinian Authority.

Conclusion.

The unique promise of this moment is the commitment of the current political leadership on all three sides to perform these tasks, combined with the will of the majority of Palestinians, Israelis and Americans for peace. For this promise to lead to peace, the indispensable leadership of the United States needs to come in the form of such tangible, hands-on mechanisms. We can encourage world leaders to lend a hand in securing peace. We can set up the system of ultimate security for both parties by incorporating them in a binding international alliance. Once we are able to deliver help to the people on the ground, we should make sure to be public and clear about our support for Mr. Abbas and the Palestinian people.

While resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is properly the main focus of our present attention and efforts, the ultimate goal must be the creation of a comprehensive regional peace in the Middle East. The constructive involvement of Egypt and Jordan is a significant indicator for prospects of such a comprehensive peace. The fact that these two countries participated in the summit at Sharm al-Sheikh earlier this week points to the broad constituency within the region for a Palestinian-Israeli peace.

To be sure, there are those in Palestine, Israel, the Arab world and here in the United States who are opposed to the peaceful vision of a two-state solution. We will hear their belligerent words and we should anticipate their nefarious deeds. Our challenge is to build successes and tangible benefits that promote a culture of reconciliation and peace, and defeat the forces of hate and violence. Peace in Palestine will deny demagogues and terrorists the most potent weapon in their arsenal.

The urgency of timely intervention cannot be overstated, as what all parties do and do not do in the coming months will determine whether this glimmer of hope becomes the dawn of a new era of peace, or proves to be merely the twilight before another long night of conflict and chaos. We must act decisively in the interests of the Israeli, Palestinian and Arab peoples, and, above all, in our own American national interest.

The summit at Sharm el Sheikh, the initial points of agreement between the parties and the prompt initial steps taken to implement them, are the most promising developments in many years. We cannot afford to fail to seize this opportunity, and commit substantial efforts and resources to achieve peace.



Strategic Plan

October, 2004

The Board and staff of ATFP are committed to build on the solid foundation that ATFP has established to allow the organization to endure and succeed in promoting its vision of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

ATFP aims at seeking peace through working to secure the establishment and success of a viable state of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza with its capital in East Jerusalem. These efforts will be guided by ATFP's mission statement, and the final objectives outlined at the founding of the organization. ATFP aims to support strengthening the foundation for an eventual state of Palestine through promoting democracy, economic development, cessation of violence and the removal of Israeli impediments to the establishment of such a state. ATFP also aims to provide support for this state once it is established to help it achieve stability and prosperity for all its citizens.

ATFP believes the key to peace is the principle of fairness. This principle recognizes that both Israelis and Palestinians have individual civil, religious and national rights in historical Palestine, and that the rights of both peoples must be recognized and accommodated.

ATFP believes that establishing a free and viable state of Palestine based on the rule of law would offer equal economic and social opportunities, which are essential foundations for a lasting peace with Israel.

ATFP is committed to integrity. This is expressed in an unwavering commitment to its goals with consistency and transparency.

ATFP recognizes the necessity for political consistency and intellectual honesty. The organization embraces a strong commitment to a single standard of morality that applies equally to positions or conduct on the part of Palestinians, Israelis and Americans.

The main field of activity for ATFP is working within our country to generate enough support to impact government policy. Our premise is that the establishment of a state of Palestine will be a vital and necessary enhancement of our national security, serve our economic interests by removing political impediments to trade with the Arab and Muslim world, and will reflect American values and our national commitment to freedom for all peoples.

ATFP will continue to expand its work with all branches of government, political and civic organizations, groups and individuals, and to build alliances with partners who share our goals.

ATFP The American Task Force on Palestine

ATFP will facilitate contacts between Palestinian officials and private individuals and our country at all possible levels in order to enhance understanding and build support for establishing a state of Palestine.

ATFP will also work with international parties, in the Arab World, Israel, Europe, other countries as well as the UN and other multilateral and non-governmental organizations to achieve its goals.

ATFP aims to become an established American institution, independent of all individuals and personalities, that will continue serving for decades to come. It shall adopt codified rules and ministerial procedures and activities designed to strike deep roots that will sustain its viability for decades to come.

ATFP plans to achieve its objectives by continuing its present policy of establishing a Board of proud and concerned Americans, who are like-minded in their commitment to the core purpose, values and mission of the organization. It is anticipated that the Board will be expanded gradually in order to provide the widest possible representation of those committed to the ATFP's mission, and who can and will make substantial contributions to its efforts. Board members shall take on specific tasks in defining and implementing approved programs, with the support of the staff.

All Board members will be subject to term limits, with a maximum of two three-year terms. New Board members will be selected and approved by sitting members each year.

It is planned to establish a parallel organization, known as *Young ATFP* this year with a core number of twelve individuals committed to ATFP's goals and values. It is anticipated that eventually it will expand to have representatives from every state.

An annual program, with an approved budget, will be outlined for each year in advance. The staff, with small departments initially, will expand according to a plan revised and approved by the Board annually. The program for the year of October 2004-October 2005 is to be approved by the Board in October 2004.

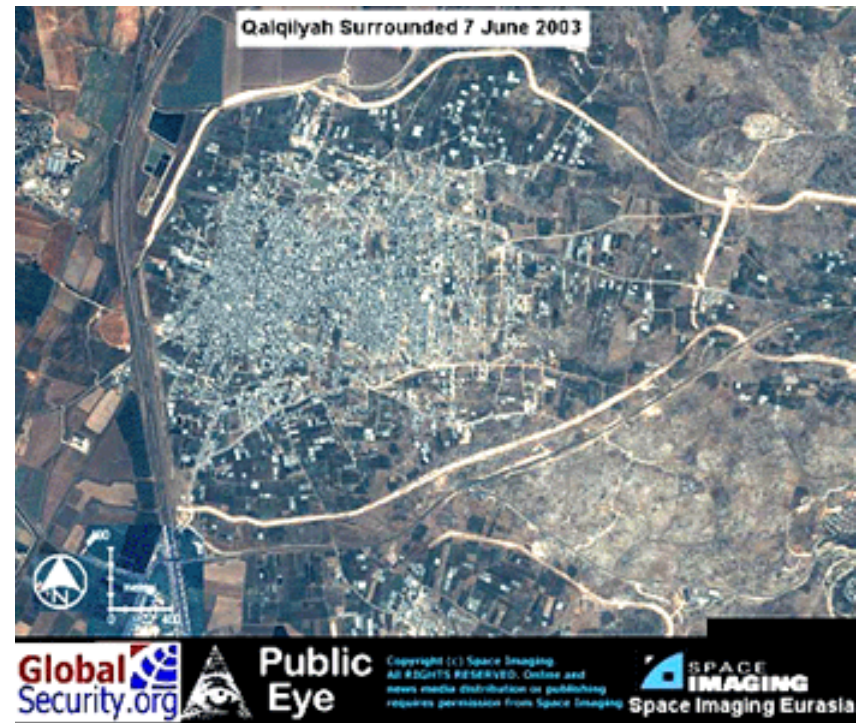
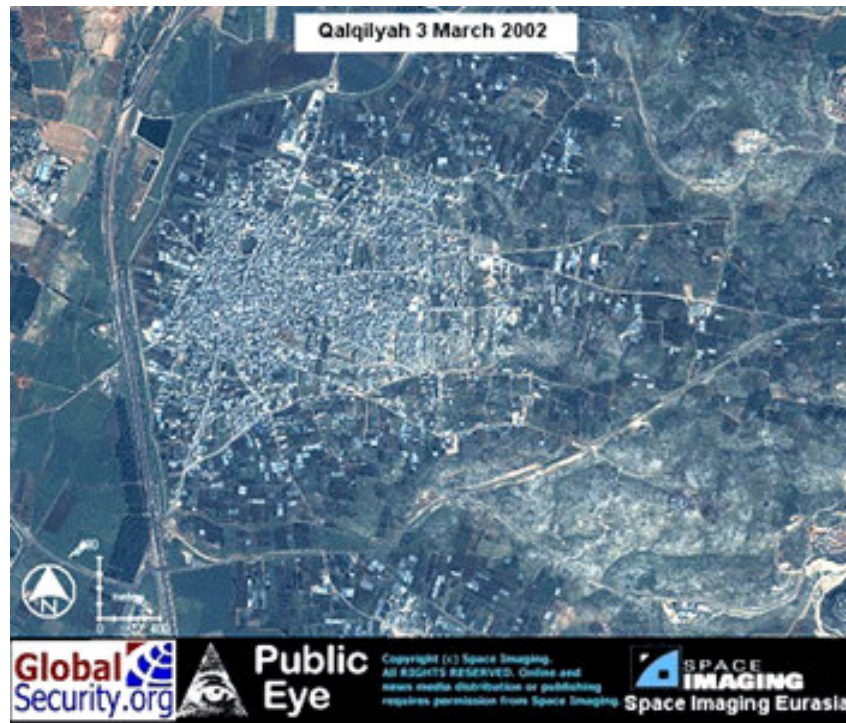
Israeli Settlements in the West Bank, October 1986



A Look at the Israeli Barrier from Space

Before

After



CLOSE UP: Qalqilyah was a relatively rich Palestinian town, nicknamed the 'bread basket.' After the Wall was constructed around it the **cost of shipping goods has tripled**. Consequently, 600 stores have been forced to close and now 75% of the town's 40,000+ residents depend on humanitarian assistance from overseas.

The Barrier around Qalqilyah - up close



The Israeli Barrier in Bethlehem



Archbishop Pietro Sambi, of Jerusalem said the wall, “cuts in half monasteries, convents, churches and cemeteries.” The pictures above are of the 25 foot high wall.